Comparative Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cced20

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To cite this article: William Yat Wai Lo (17 Apr 2024): Towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics: higher education policy discourses in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao, Comparative Education, DOI: 10.1080/03050068.2024.2335014

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2024.2335014

Published online: 17 Apr 2024.

COMPARATIVE EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2024.2335014

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics: higher education policy discourses in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the intertwining and evolution of neoliberal and nationalist discourses in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao, arguing that their combination reveals the dual layers of political rationality in the dynamics of higher education policymaking. It suggests a move towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics, marked by gradual and continuous shifts towards decolonisation and re-Sinicisation within the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework. This perspective contrasts with existing literature on Hong Kong that emphasises the maintenance of the colonial status quo and points out abrupt changes due to the 2019 protests and the 2020 National Security Law. By analysing the reconfiguration of governmentality in the higher education systems of these post-colonial Chinese societies amid changing political landscapes, the article sheds light on both the incremental changes and significant moments influencing the trajectory of higher education development in Hong Kong and Macao.

邁向具中國特色的治理性：後殖民時代香港和澳門的高等教育政策論述

摘要

本文檢視新自由主義和民族主義論述在後殖民時代香港和澳門的交織與演變，認為它們的結合揭示了高等教育政策制定動態中政治理性的雙重性。研究表明，具有中國特色的治理性得以發展，其標誌是在「一國兩制」的框架內逐步、持續地向去殖民化和再中國化轉變。這一觀點與強調維持香港殖民現狀，並指出了2019年的抗議活動和2020年的《國家安全法》所帶來的劇變的現有文獻形成鮮明對比。本文透過分析這些中國後殖民地社會不斷變化的政治格局中高等教育體系治理性的重構，揭示了影響香港和澳門高等教育發展軌蹟的漸進變化和重要時刻。

KEYWORDS

Governmentality with Chinese characteristics; decolonialisation; re-Sinicisation; One Country, Two Systems; greater bay area

關鍵詞

具中國特色的治理性，去殖民化，再中國化，一國兩制，大灣區

Introduction

Hong Kong and Macao were formerly under British (1842–1997) and Portuguese (1557–1999) colonial rule, respectively. They are now designated as Special Administrative

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Regions (SARs) of China and are governed under the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems'. Although the political framework allows the SARs to maintain their distinctive systems in various aspects, including higher education, the retrocession of the cities to Chinese sovereignty necessitates their post-colonial transformations. The governance of post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao thus is characterised by an emphasis on promoting national integration and patriotism across different sectors, including higher education, in response to the political circumstances (Cai et al. 2022; Chun 2019).

Despite the circumstances, higher education developments in the SARs have substantially been influenced by the prevailing global trend of neoliberalism. Following the handovers, higher education policies of both SARs have prioritised enhancing their competitiveness. This policy orientation has resulted in a university governance style that emphasises global competition, academic excellence, and research productivity – all of which align with the principles of neoliberalism (Hao 2016; Postiglione and Jung 2017).

This emphasis on both patriotism and neoliberal ideas closely aligns with contemporary Chinese nationalism, intertwining socialist (e.g. dedication to the nation and the Party) and neoliberal (e.g. dedication to economic competition) rationales while promoting the embrace of traditional Chinese cultural values (Wang 2017; Zhao 2023).

Chinese nationalism shapes the contextual realities of higher education in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao, constituting dual layers of political rationality in the dynamics of higher education policymaking. This article addresses the presence and implications of these dual layers for higher education policy by demonstrating the adoption of two parallel governmental rationalities, namely neoliberalism and Chinese nationalism, in the policy discourses embedded within the policy texts of post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao. The article begins with background information on higher education within the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework. It then draws on Foucault's concept of governmentality to propose a theoretical orientation of 'governmentality with Chinese characteristics'. This is followed by a description of the methodology. Next, the article presents the findings of a discourse analysis of policy addresses of the two SARs, illustrating the emergence and prevalence of discourses emphasising patriotism and dedication to the country. Based on these findings, the article argues that higher education in both SARs has undergone a transition towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics.

Higher education in one country with two systems

Both the SARs established their higher education systems during the colonial eras. The University of Hong Kong was founded in 1911, with the aims of extending Britain's cultural influence in Asia and producing an Anglicised ruling Chinese elite to support the colonial rule (Law 2009). The Chinese University of Hong Kong was established in 1963 to offer an alternative in the university sector. Despite the establishment of another university, the atmosphere of Hong Kong's higher education remained elitist until the 1990s. In Macao, the establishment of St. Paul College in 1594 exhibits the city's unique characteristics due to its long-standing European legacy and historical association with Catholicism. However, higher education stagnated in the city for more than two centuries after the college's closure in 1762. Bray and Kwo (2003) attribute this stagnation to Macao's small internal education market and laissez-faire government policies, which led to a

reliance on external education sources and limited investment in higher education during the colonial period.

Higher education expansion began in the two cities during the twilight of the colonial periods. In Hong Kong, the government decided to increase the higher education enrolment rate to 18% by establishing more universities and granted university status to existing institutions in 1989. Similarly, since signing the Sino – Portuguese agreement on returning Macao to China in 1987, the government assumed an active role in higher education development. For example, it purchased the private University of East Asia in 1988 and converted it into the public University of Macau in 1991. Ten higher education institutions were established between 1988 and 2001. In short, political transitions played a role in accelerating higher education development in the two cities (Bray 2001; Law 1997).

Neoliberal globalisation has become a significant force driving higher education development in the two SARs at the dawn of the post-colonial era. In Hong Kong, higher education expansion continued after 1997, with the goals of increasing the higher education participation rate to 60% and nurturing human capital for a knowledge economy. This resulted in the emergence and rapid growth of the self-financing sector in the higher education system. Furthermore, Hong Kong launched a policy of developing itself into an education hub, which aimed to boost economic development, create business opportunities, and enhance global competitiveness, in the early 2000s (Lo and Tang 2017). Meanwhile, the neoliberal globalisation process has led to an increased emphasis on the knowledge economy, higher demand for higher education, and a call for higher education internationalisation in Macao (Lau and Yuen 2015). Moreover, the global trends motivated efforts to establish world-class universities (Vong and Yu 2018). Consequently, engaging with the competitive global knowledge economy and enhancing the international profiles and rankings of universities become the goals of higher education policy in the two SARs.

Currently, there are 20 degree-awarding higher education institutions, of which eight are funded by the governments through the University Grants Committee (UGC) and five are ranked among the world's top 100 universities, in Hong Kong. Following the British model, Hong Kong established the UGC in the 1960s to steer the government-funded universities for imposing an indirect method of holding the university to account and upholding university autonomy (Lo 2020). In Macao, a round of governance reforms begun in the late 2010s provided the government with a greater role in steering the higher education sector through strengthening the quality assurance mechanisms and regulations. At present, Macao has four public and six private higher education institutions, which are monitored by the government's Education and Youth Development Bureau. Macao's top university, the University of Macau, was constantly ranked among the top 50–100 in Asia, and thus positioned as a research university with a regional reputation (Vong and Lo 2023).

Higher education policy and development in the two SARs are associated with political circumstances (Law 2019; Lo 2023; Vong and Lo 2023). Literature notes that, despite the application of the 'Two Systems' concept, the Chinese Central Government has placed increasing emphasis on the 'One Country' principle in governing the two SARs in recent years (Chan 2018; Vickers and Morris 2022). This emphasis is viewed as a form of *decolonialisation* (or *re-Sinicisation*), shaping the political circumstances of these SARs. The former denotes the assimilation of a Chinese national identity and nationalism

forged in defiance of Western colonialism (Tam 2024), while the latter entails the acceptance of a Han-dominant Chineseness, grounded in ethnic nationalism prevalent in contemporary China (Lin and Jackson 2021; Vickers 2022). However, the political circumstances in the two cities differ. In Macao, although there was a blending of Portuguese and Chinese cultures that shaped its identity (Kaeding 2010; Lam 2010), residents did not strongly embrace their distinct local identity post-handover and generally identified more with the Chinese national identity, likely influenced by China's significant governance role during the colonial period (Cai et al. 2022). In these contexts, the post-colonial administration in Macao has emphasised the promotion of national integration and patriotism across different areas since the retrocession (Chun 2019). By contrast, Hong Kong has long positioned itself as a place where East meets West. Research indicates that such a position cultivated its political and cultural proximity to Chineseness and Westernness during the colonial period, which was preserved under the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework and constituted the inherent tensions between 'becoming Chinese' and 'remaining global' in the evolution of the positioning of post-colonial Hong Kong (Cheung 2021; Chiu and Lui 2009).

Meanwhile, integration into national development has become a prominent feature of policymaking in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao. This is evident in the fact that the two SARs have been included in China's national development plan since the 11th Five-Year Plan issued in 2002. Later, the Chinese Central Government introduced the Guangdong – Hong Kong – Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) development plan, which includes Hong Kong, Macao, and nine cities in the Guangdong Province of Southern China, in its 13th Five-Year Plan in 2016. The aim of this strategic plan is to encourage cross-border collaboration and integration among cities in the area, combining the strengths of the Pearl River Delta cities to support China's 'going global' strategy (Lo, Lee, and Abdrasheva 2022). By prioritising innovation and technology, the strategic plan seeks to achieve socio-economic development in the GBA through cooperation in various policy areas, including education. Therefore, the development plan encourages universities in the GBA to collaborate in research, student exchange, and education programmes, thereby promoting cross-border collaboration between academia and industry in the area. These initiatives were consolidated in the Framework Agreement on Deepening Guangdong – Hong Kong – Macao Cooperation in the Development of the GBA signed in 2017 and the Outline Development Plan for the GBA promulgated by the Chinese Central Government in 2019 (CMAB 2017; 2019). The former aims to deepen academic exchanges and cooperation among cities in the region, while the latter encourages universities in the area to intensify their cooperation. Given these policy initiatives, research literature suggests the emergence of the GBA as a subnational higher education region (Lo and Li 2023; Oleksiyenko and Liu 2023; Xie, Liu, and McNay 2023; Xie, Postiglione, and Huang 2021).

Towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics

This article adopts Foucault's concept of governmentality for its analysis, as the concept offers a potent framework for dissecting the complex interplay between neoliberalism and sovereign will within higher education policies in Hong Kong and Macao. According to Foucault (1982, 790), 'power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as

they are free'. Thus, he noted that the exercise of power within governments involves a set of actions designed to influence potential actions, operating within a realm of possibilities in which the behaviour of acting individuals is imprinted. To describe this art of government, Foucault coined the term 'governmentality', which combines the words 'to govern' and 'mentality', to reflect 'an account of historically specific relations of power, practices of subjectification and technologies through which the "conduct of conduct" is regulated' (Bansel 2014, 18). Foucault believed that the most significant domain of governmentality occurs when the external imposition of a collective good is internalised and becomes the technology of self-governance for the well-being of individuals.

The governmentality concept is useful to illustrate how neoliberalism has emerged as a dominant political ideology. Neoliberalism can be seen as 'an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade', within which the government is required to 'create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices' (Harvey 2005, 3). As such, neoliberal governmentality represents an interpretation of governmentality that highlights neoliberalism as the primary component of governmental rationality (Foucault 2008). It emphasises the role of political economy as the operating mechanism, with stress on economic competitiveness being primary for the population's prosperity. Such form of governmentality transforms individuals into self-contained enterprises that operate in a competitive arena, where they voluntarily offer their human capital to maximise revenues and productivity through techniques such as auditing, accounting, and management (Olssen 2016). In other words, neoliberal governmentality refers to 'a terrain of knowledge and a system of social and individual control' (Gill 2003, 130).

Higher education is viewed as an exemplar of neoliberal governmentality, as contemporary higher education governance is characterised by adoption of market principles and mechanisms, privatisation of public goods and restructuring of public sector organisations based on managerialism and managerial tools transplanted from the private sector (Olssen 2016). As a result, the purpose of higher education has been re-evaluated and adjusted to function as a governing technology that primarily aims to maximise productivity and economic growth (Baker and Brown 2007).

Neoliberalisation of higher education is manifested with globalisation, as neoliberalism can be institutionalised in the global governance structure (Gill 2003). Examples include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank, which promote the economic imperative for higher education policy in the global knowledge economy (Peters 2007). More importantly, as the increasing global interconnectivity has imposed the rhetorical circulation of neoliberal discourse on global competitiveness, neoliberalisation has been prominent in the changes in higher education governance at international, national, and local scales (Deuel 2022). In other words, the neoliberal global agenda promoted by the international organisations facilitate a move towards neoliberal governmentality in higher education in individual societies, including Hong Kong and Macao.

To demonstrate the alignment between neoliberal governmentality and China's sovereign will, literature indicates that the Chinese state successfully adopts neoliberal ideas and practices to cultivate human subjects in the socialist Chinese context. Thus, in this literature, China has been described as a 'hybrid socialist-neoliberal form (or "neo-Leninist") of political rationality' (Sigley 2006) and as a combination of 'neoliberal technologies

of power' (or 'reform era definitions of economic development') and 'collectively oriented politics and ethics' (or 'Maoist era norms of caring for the nation') (Hoffman 2006; 2014). Sigley (2006, 489) describes neo-Leninist governmentality in contemporary China as simultaneously exhibiting traditional authoritarian characteristics while promoting a form of governance that encourages a degree of autonomy among certain individuals or groups, rather than universally applying across all subjects. Palmer and Winiger (2019, 560) further argue that in China's 'neo-socialist governmentality',

> many of the expert authorities, discourses and technologies resemble those of the West and partake in the same global circulation of scientific knowledge production and international technical norms. But, at the same time, they are never fully independent, and are institutionally anchored to centralised state and Party organs that deploy their own techniques to ensure compliance to the Party's goals.

Such an emphasis on obedience to the Party's goals aligns with the essence of contemporary Chinese nationalism, encompassing collectivism and political loyalty within the party-state framework (Guo 2004). According to Wang (2017), contemporary Chinese nationalism represents a 'hybrid' form integrating temporal aspects (such as historical national humiliation and aspirations for present and future national rejuvenation) and spatial dimensions (such as being involved in global governance and 'going global' of Chinese culture) within both political and cultural spheres. This nationalism essentially shapes both official narratives and individual perceptions of citizenship, thereby reinforcing patriotism and authoritarianism in the Chinese context (Lin 2023; Vickers 2022; Zhao 2023). Overall, the literature on China's governmentality reveals that, in the context of globalisation, Chinese authorities effectively merge neoliberalism and authoritarianism by developing 'an enormous, vertically organised apparatus equipped with increasingly sophisticated instruments of social engineering and for shaping peoples' subjectivities and guiding their conduct from a distance' (Palmer and Winiger 2019, 560).

In the context of higher education, Marginson (2018, 494) acknowledges that 'academic agency' is 'a tool used for nation-building' in China. Thus, the hybrid in higher education governance is a 'national/global synergy', which 'combines the unique Leninist state in China with the corporate university familiar across the world and academic norms of open science and decision-making on the basis of disciplinary judgment' (Marginson 2018, 494). Specifically, the higher education model in contemporary China uniquely integrates traditional statecraft (e.g. Confucianism) with Leninism (i.e. combing party networks with administrative authorities at every level of institution to form the party-state in various sectors, including higher education) and Western neoliberal elements (e.g. market mechanism), creating a blend that fosters a dynamic balance between top-down directives and bottom-up agency with freedom. This is underpinned by collaboration among the Party, university leadership, and faculty staff, aligning academia with the state's ambitions (Wen and Marginson 2023). In this governing model, academics navigate their dual roles as 'implementers of political socialisation' (who implement the state's requirements and expectations of the university) and 'pursuers of academic freedom' (who strive for freedom of thought and expression in teaching and research) to align with both state directives and academic integrity, reflecting an intricate balance between state control and intellectual freedom (Du 2018). This model embodies a higher education system with 'Chinese characteristics', marked by academics being

required to be fully engaged with the present global science system, while simultaneously highlighting their loyalty to the party-state in the context of globalisation (Marginson 2022). In line with this argument, Han (2021) posits that Chinese (transnational) higher education policy can be viewed as a disciplinary technology that produces nationalist subjects (i.e. university students) who simultaneously subordinate to neoliberal logic (e.g. the concept of students as customers) and the whims and rules of the sovereign (e.g. political loyalty to the party-state), although she recognises the existence of conflicts between neoliberalism and authoritarianism and of resistance from the subjects in such governmentality (Han 2023).

Wu and Vong (2017) explain the significance of the incorporation of political loyalty into governmentality in understanding higher education development within the 'One Country, Two Systems' context. By considering space redistribution a disciplinary technology (Foucault 1984), they argue that the creation of new space in mainland China for a Macao university involves the formation of social orders, relations, and identities. On this basis, they postulate the re-bordering process as a way to accelerate 'political assimilation' as well as 'mainlandisation' or 'Sinicisation', and thus suggest that there is a reconfiguration of governmentality in the SAR (Vong and Lo 2023; see also Wu and Vong 2017, 949–950).

This article employs these conceptual elements of governmentality with Chinese characteristics to examine how the neoliberal and nationalist discourses are mobilised to understand and form Hong Kong and Macao's higher education policy in their neoliberalisation and decolonialisation/re-Sinicisation processes, thereby explicating the rationales underpinning the relationship between the state and the behaviours of higher education institutions and individuals in the two SARs of China. The article views universities as targeted sites of disciplinary technologies and examines how governmentality is shaped in Hong Kong and Macao's higher education within the context of global, national, and local factors. Given their post-colonial contexts and the increasing emphasis on nationalism and patriotism, higher education policymaking in the two SARs is conceptualised as a transition towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics.

Data and methods

This article employs Foucauldian discourse analysis to scrutinise the higher education policy discourses in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao. In Foucauldian discourse analysis, discourses are regarded as more than mere speech or writing; they are practices intertwined with institutional processes, shaping and being shaped by social structures. They offer unique perspectives on how one perceives and exists in the world, influencing subjectivity and experience. Applying a historical lens, Foucauldian discourse analysis also explores the evolution of discourses over time, impacting historical subjectivities. It highlights the relationship between discourse and institutions, demonstrating how discourses validate and are supported by social and institutional structures. This approach unveils the dynamic interplay of language, power, and societal organisation, providing insights into the construction of social realities (Willig 2021). Following this methodological approach, this study explores underlying discourses, such as the absence or necessity of dedication to the country, and the embedded power relations – namely, the political relationships between the SARs and their motherland – that shape higher education

policy (Khan and MacEachen 2021). This exploration sheds light on the evolution of these discourses and reveals the reconfiguration of governmentality within the higher education systems of the two SARs.

The analysis presented in this article is primarily based on policy addresses [i.e. the annual addresses by the Chief Executives (CEs) of the Hong Kong and Macao SARs] published in the post-colonial periods (1997–2023 in Hong Kong, 2000–2024 in Macao). The inclusion of policy addresses from these periods aims to reveal the evolution of policy discourses throughout the entire post-colonial eras. As the policy addresses outlines the SAR governments' policy objectives and initiatives for the coming years, they are considered key documents for the CEs to communicate the SAR governments' priorities and vision, and to address issues of concerns to the public. In this sense, analysing the policy addresses is an effective way to outline the desired outcomes that the governments aim to achieve. Meanwhile, documents published by key higher education governing bodies, such as the UGC and Education Bureau in Hong Kong and Education and Youth Development Bureau (formerly known as Higher Education Bureau) in Macao, were consulted as supplementary sources of data. All these policy documents are publicly accessible.

Guided by Willig's (2021) six-stage approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis, this study delves deeper into the intricacies of higher education policy discourses in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao. It begins with discursive constructions, identifying and describing how concepts like 'global competitiveness' and 'love for the motherland' are constructed within the discourse, examining the specific language and themes used to discuss neoliberalism and nationalism. The discourses stage links these languages and themes to broader social, political, and historical discourses, assessing their impact on educational priorities. At the action orientation stage, the study examines how the discourse around 'global competitiveness' and 'patriotism' guides the actions of universities, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the higher education sector. The positioning of subjects stage explores the subject positions offered by these discourses, such as positioning universities as 'drivers of economic growth' and 'facilitators of patriotism'. Following this, the practice stage investigates the practices promoted by these discourses, such as developing the education industry and establishing a subnational higher education region. Lastly, at the subjectivity stage, the analysis considers how these discourses might shape the experiences and self-perceptions of the academic community in the contexts of global competition and national allegiance. This approach offers insights into the construction, dissemination, and effect of higher education policy discourses in Hong Kong and Macao, considering their broader socio-political contexts.

Enhancing global competitiveness through neoliberalisation

Since the early 1990s, there has been a growing push to shift towards a knowledge-based economy in Hong Kong, which has led to a greater demand for higher education opportunities. This desire for transformation, coupled with the assumption that there is a correlation between education and economic competitiveness, has greatly impacted the discourse surrounding higher education policy in the territory since the late 1990s. The desire was revealed in the CE's emphasis on 'cultivat(ing)

and retain(ing) a critical mass of talented people' for a knowledge-based economy (HKSARG 1997–2023, 19). Thus, he indicated that education plays an essential role in providing 'the human resources for further economic development' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 14) and acting as 'the starting point for the development of an enlightened, knowledge-based society' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 30).

Amid the emphasis on the economic role of higher education, Hong Kong embraced privatisation and marketisation to achieve the government's goal of increasing local access to higher education (HKSARG 1997–2023, 11). Later, 'developing the education industry' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 11) and 'becoming an education hub' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 18) became the policy goals, with internationalisation considered as a measure to facilitate non-local, especially mainland Chinese, students, to pursue higher education in Hong Kong (HKSARG 1997–2023, 18). Indeed, during the late 2000s – early 2010s, higher education was identified as one of the six new economic engines that complemented traditional economic pillars, created new business opportunities, and enhanced Hong Kong's competitiveness to overcome the 2007–2008 financial crisis (HKSARG 1997–2023). Consequently, internationalisation was considered a way to support the education hub strategy and the industrialisation of higher education, thereby sustaining Hong Kong's global status and its economic and social developments (UGC 2004; 2010). It is obvious that Hong Kong's neoliberal reforms during this period appeared to adopt the concept of 'market as a new disciplinary technology' in the higher education sector (Olssen and Peters 2005).

A similar discourse on the economic role of higher education was observed in Macao. For instance, the CE noted that 'the enterprising spirit and efforts of entrepreneurs and the population in general constitute the main driving force for developing society and a market economy' (MSARG 2000–2024, 16). In the following year's policy address, the CE further remarked that 'we have no alternative but boost our own competitiveness, and the promotion of the development of science and education is an integral component of this strategy' (MSARG 2000–2024, 17). Subsequently, the CEs consistently highlighted the links between the competitive international environment and higher education's economic roles, such as its function in training and attracting talent (MSARG various years). The reference to competitiveness, productivity and enterprising spirit vividly illustrates the alignment of the SARs' adoption of neoliberalism with the political objectives of neoliberal rationality, which underlines developing and training the self-enterprising and self-regulated citizens (Hoffman 2006; 2014).

However, despite emphasising competition and implementing reforms during the 2000s and 2010s, the Macao SAR Government did not integrate market principles and mechanisms into its higher education system during the period. This was due to the rapid growth of the casino industry, which contributed substantial tax revenues, creating a financial buffer that deterred the implementation of market-oriented approaches in higher education, including privatisation and individualisation of social provisions (Lau and Yuen 2015; Wu and Vong 2017). Nonetheless, due to the economic recession in recent years, the government has expressed its new objectives of adopting a market-oriented approach to higher education development and fostering the commercialisation of research through university – industry collaboration (MSARG 2020–2024). Thus, it is important to monitor the progress of this marketisation initiative and its impact on the higher education policy in Macao.

Pursuing global excellence

Within the context of enhancing global competitiveness, the discourse on the economic rationale for higher education development appeared as a quest for improving the quality of higher education in Macao through internationalisation. As the CE stated, 'in tertiary education, the priority must be the improvement of educational quality' (MSARG 2000–2024, 21). The emphasis on educational quality is considered a strategy aligned with neoliberalism since it motivates academics to conform to predetermined targets, indicators, and criteria (Ball 2003). This pursuit of educational excellence eventually evolved into a desire to produce an elite group, as evidenced by the government's intent to 'create an academic and cultural atmosphere on the campuses of our tertiary institutions that is centred on elite academics and professors' (MSARG 2000–2024, 16). The cultivation of an elite group was also reflected in the government's initiative to 'nurture talented local people and facilitate their career growth and … build a pool of high-calibre skilled people for the ongoing development of Macao' (MSARG 2000–2024, 8) and 'invite internationally acclaimed scholars to take up positions in Macao' (MSARG 2000–2024, 17). Such an account of elite-making essentially reflects neoliberal ideology, which encourages people to embrace competition and self-maximisation (Ball 2012).

The emphasis on competitiveness also resulted in an urge to strengthen universities' research and development capabilities (MSARG 2000–2024, 12) and undertake scientific research aligned with Macao's development needs (MSARG 2000–2024, 8). It also brought about a change in the performance evaluation system, which now stresses the importance of aligning with 'international standards in developed countries' (MSARG 2000–2024, 25). Therefore, research-oriented universities in the city have prioritised the pursuit of global rankings, and the evaluation of academic staff at these universities now places significant emphasis on research productivity, which is a crucial criterion in major ranking schemes.

In Hong Kong, the introduction of managerial reforms can be traced back to the early 1990s when the UGC adopted the British model to begin its quality assurance with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 1993. Since then, RAEs have been conducted regularly along with other quality assurance initiatives. In 2007, the Quality Assurance Council was established under the UGC to oversee the quality of programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions at the first-degree and above levels. To make use of the RAE for economic purposes, the Hong Kong SAR Government requested 'the UGC to expand the assessment criteria to include research impact and effectiveness of knowledge and technology transfer'. This urged 'universities to conduct more impactful and translational research projects that meet Hong Kong's needs, to tie in with the work promoting the development of industries and re-industrialisation' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 24). This request for research of broader social relevance with economic and social benefits explains the inclusion of 'research impact' in the RAE in 2020 (UGC 2023).

These assessment measures substantially impacted academics' research and teaching motivations. As Macfarlane (2017, 100) explains, 'the RAE permeates from the institutional to the individual level placing individual academics under pressure to publish more and in particular ways'. In this sense, the assessment techniques implemented in both SARs reflect the emergence of a managerial accountability agenda, which 'employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change –

based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)' in the neoliberal context (Ball 2003, 216). Additionally, this change highlights the influence of institutional behaviours in shaping the preferences of individuals, thereby illustrating the notion of producing self-interested subjects within the framework of neoliberal governmentality (Olssen 2003).

In addition to self-maximisation, the neoliberal discourse on higher education also appeared as a continuous call for 'nurturing and enlarging a pool of talent' (HKSARG various years) and 'pursuing excellence' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 31) in Hong Kong. To attract overseas talent, the government decided to increase 'the admission quotas for non-local students to local tertiary institutions', relax 'employment restrictions on non-local students,' and provide 'scholarships to strengthen support to local and non-local students' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 43). The CE clearly stated that 'such measures will enhance our status as an education hub and bring young, new, and high-quality talent into our population' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 43). These policies show that, apart from developing an education industry, the government also intended to use the education hub strategy to cultivate and retain a skilled workforce (Knight 2013).

Nevertheless, the education hub strategy aimed at internationalisation faced a backlash, as it was seen as promoting 'mainlandisation' (Lai and Maclean 2011) or 'delocalisation' (Lui 2014) in higher education, given that around 70% of non-local students in Hong Kong are from mainland China. Therefore, the government recalibrated the marketisation and opening-up policy in the mid 2010s (Lo 2017). For example, it has begun to subsidise self-financing university students and provide scholarship to '100 outstanding local students each cohort to pursue studies in renowned universities outside Hong Kong' since 2015 (HKSARG 1997–2023, 32). It responded to 'concerns that non-local students are taking up precious public resources at the expense of local students' by requiring that 'all approved UGC-funded places should be fully utilised to admit local students' (Education Bureau 2014, 5). It also injected new funding to 'provide studentships for local students admitted to UGC-funded research postgraduate programmes to incentivise more local students to engage in research work, thereby promoting the development of innovation and technology' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 31). This recalibration not only reveals resistance to the neoliberalisation of higher education but also highlights the emergence of a political circumstance where the rise of localism and anti-mainland sentiments is observed in the decolonisation/re-Sinicisation process. This political circumstance captures the trajectory of higher education development in post-colonial Hong Kong (Lin and Jackson 2020; Lo 2023) and contextualises and justifies the move towards governmentality with Chinese characteristics discussed in the next section.

Thriving together with the motherland through the construction of a subnational higher education region

As previously mentioned, the political circumstances in the two SARs vary. However, policy addresses in both cities reveal the necessity of fostering patriotism, albeit to varying degrees. In Macao, the CEs have declared the goal of 'heightening citizens' traditional sense of love for the motherland' since the retrocession of the city to Chinese sovereignty (MSARG 2000–2024, 4), and have reiterated the significance of fostering patriotism in society and particularly among youth, as well as reinforcing patriotic education

throughout the entire education system, including higher education, in their policy addresses (MSARG various years). The terms 'patriotism', 'patriotic education', and 'love for the motherland/our country' are commonly used in the policy addresses. This emphasis on patriotism within post-colonial contexts can be interpreted as a manifestation of governmentality. It signifies a process of post-colonial construction and/or destruction that involves 'the re-formation of subjectivities and the re-organisation of social spaces in which subjects act and are acted upon' (Scott 1995, 191). The CE further noted that cultivating a strong sense of national pride is necessary for 'the sound development of the MSAR in a political sense' (2000–2024, 6):

> 'One country, two systems' integrates the nation's objectives and the interests of the Macao SAR at the highest level. Without the protection and support of our motherland, building a quality community in Macao would be an impossible dream. So, love for our country and love for Macao combines passion and practicality. (MSARG 2000–2024, 9)

These policy texts are illustrative of the amalgamation of patriotism and development, aligning with China's national circumstances where political loyalty is merged with the imperative of advancing the nation, forming a unique governmentality paradigm (Palmer and Winiger 2019). Crucially, this governmentality paradigm aligns with contemporary Chinese nationalism, emphasising and amalgamating such themes as 'prosperity', 'modernisation', 'national development', 'national rejuvenation', 'loving the Party, the country and socialism', serving as pathways toward achieving 'great power' status (Guo 2004; Lin 2023; Wang 2017; Zhao 2023). Therefore, underscoring the significance of patriotism in relation to development serves as a mechanism for aligning the sovereign will and individual behaviour within the Chinese context (Dean 2010).

The discourse in Hong Kong subtly intertwined patriotism with competitiveness and development, avoiding explicit mentions of 'patriotism' or 'patriotic education' before 2023. Instead, the government repeatedly asserts 'a win-win situation' (HKSARG 1997–2023), emphasising that 'when Hong Kong succeeds, China will benefit; when China succeeds, Hong Kong will prosper' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 27). Meanwhile, patriotism-related accounts, such as 'a sense of belonging/national identity/national pride' and 'love (for) our motherland' (HKSARG various years), were used to describe the idea that:

> There is increasing recognition by the people of Hong Kong that we and our mainland compatriots are of the same blood. We share a common interest and destiny. (HKSARG 1997–2023, 5)

The CE has also indicated that 'adapting to globalisation and integrating with the mainland are not two contradictory paths of development for Hong Kong', as the city 'can play an important role in the peaceful rise of our country' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 11). This account can be seen as a response to the argument about tensions between 'becoming Chinese' and 'remaining global' under the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework (Cheung 2021) and a resonance of the idea of making Hong Kong 'a Chinese global city' (Chiu and Lui 2009). Nevertheless, while the CEs had stressed the importance of national education since 2007 (HKSARG 1997–2023, 49–51) and decided to implement a Moral and National Education Curriculum in 2011 (HKSARG 1997–2023, 55), the decision resulted in a large-scale anti-national education movement, which forced the government to withdraw the proposed curriculum, in 2012. This movement (as well as the 2014 and

2019 protest movements) vividly reveals the political tensions and conflicts during Hong Kong's post-colonial transition. However, as the political climate shifted markedly after the introduction of the National Security Law in 2020 (see Vickers and Morris 2022 for details), national security education became compulsory for all Hong Kong universities and schools (Baehr 2022), and the subject of Citizenship and Social Development has replaced that of Liberal Studies in the school curriculum (Vickers 2024), with the promotion of patriotic and national security education becoming a significantly emphasised task in policy addresses (HKSARG 1997–2023, 6–8). The changed political atmosphere also supports the rejuvenation of the education hub strategy, increasing the admission of non-local students from 20% to 40%, with a focus on students from the Chinese mainland and countries covered by China's Belt and Road Initiative (HKSARG 1997–2023, 67–68).

Building a subnational higher education region

In the discursive context of thriving together with the motherland, both SARs have continuously advocated for cooperation and integration with mainland China, particularly in the Pearl River Delta region, in the policy addresses since the handover. In Hong Kong, this is evident from that deepening integration with the Chinese mainland has been portrayed and reiterated as 'a wave of opportunities' with 'the Central Government's support' in policy addresses since the handover (HKSARG various years). The integration process gained momentum when the Chinese Central Government incorporated both SARs in its Five-Year Plan in 2011, followed by the introduction of the GBA strategy in 2016. As a result, the integration of Hong Kong into China's national development has emerged as a crucial policy objective. In this context, the CEs announced a 'what the country needs, what Hong Kong is good at' policy (HKSARG 1997–2023, 9) and decided to extend the scope of co-operation between the SAR and the mainland to various areas (HKSARG 1997–2023, 31).

In the realm of higher education, the integration of universities into the national development agenda has provided a rationale for collaborative initiatives, including the establishment of branch campuses and cross-border research funding schemes, between universities in the GBA (Lo and Tang 2020). For example, the CE stated that the government support and assist 'universities in Hong Kong in their plans to provide education services in the GBA' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 35). Currently, seven Hong Kong universities have either established or announced their intention to establish branch campuses within the GBA (Lo and Li 2023). Moreover, the Chinese Central Government has allowed universities and research institutions in Hong Kong to bid for its science and technology funding (HKSARG 1997–2023, 36) and 'has made available quite a number of national research and development projects and funding schemes to researchers in Hong Kong' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 41). According to the government's figures, as of 2022, there were 2,320 collaborative academic research projects ongoing between higher education institutions in Hong Kong and the mainland. Additionally, six Hong Kong universities have established industry-academia-research bases or research institutes in Shenzhen, Hong Kong's neighbouring city, thereby strengthening cooperation with mainland Chinese institutions in scientific research (Legislative Council 2023). When encouraging Hong Kong researchers and universities to participate in national research and development work, the CE noted that 'we are all proud of the fact that

some of the instruments currently used on the Moon and Mars were developed by (the Hong Kong Polytechnic University), which has actively participated in our nation's space exploration projects' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 35–36). These accounts substantially represent an illustration of the corelation between competitiveness/development and the sense of national pride and belonging.

The narratives of serving the country and integrating with the GBA highlight the emergence of this subnational region as a new territorial unit that is transforming the socio-political identity, policies, and practices of the SARs (Robertson 2006). The emphasis on the link between regional integration and the enhancement of the competitiveness of both SARs and their universities aligns with the idea of combining the discourse of global competition with the political objective of producing nationalist subjects in China's higher education context (Han 2021; 2023). Furthermore, given the political conflicts and tensions witnessed in Hong Kong during the post-colonial era, the discourses are interpreted as a form of re-education, which serves to transform the SARs' local identity into a Chinese national one and uphold China's national security (Vickers and Morris 2022). This intention is evident from the CE's call for 'strengthen(ing) students' sense of national identity and national pride, and rais(ing) their awareness to safeguard the national security of our country together' (HKSARG 1997–2023, 52).

In Macao, the collaboration with Guangdong's Hengqin Island exemplified the inclination towards integration with the mainland. The project began in the early 2000s and subsequently evolved into an in-depth cooperation zone, thereby fostering 'regional cooperation and integration' in various domains (MSARG various years).

In the higher education arena, regional integration is demonstrated by the relocation of the University of Macau to the new campus on Hengqin Island in 2014. According to the government, the relocation aimed to 'upgrade cross-border cooperation' (MSARG 2000–2024) and inject 'fresh impetus and momentum into the development of local tertiary education' (MSARG 2000–2024, 11). Following the small-states thesis, the move also allowed Macao's higher education to overcome the constraints imposed by its small size (Bray and Kwo 2003). Wu and Vong (2017) add that the relocation, together with the global competition measures, rebranded the university. Indeed, the Hengqin campus promises to scale up in global rankings and transform the university into an institution with regional and even global education reputation. Nevertheless, Wu and Vong (2017, 947) argue that the relocation of the university results in a disruption of institutional history and memory, as well as a weakening of the academic traditions that have been cultivated over time. Therefore, they assert that the spatial creation/integration is a disciplinary technology that accelerates the transformation of the university's socio-political identity. It signifies a process of assimilation and mainlandisation of Macao's higher education system (Wu and Vong 2017, 949–950). This assertion reminds us of the relationship between space and power, which reveals that space can be reorganised and redefined to shape the behaviours and identities of those who inhabit them (Foucault 1984).

Recent emphasis on the GBA accelerates integration between Macao and the mainland. For example, the 2017 Framework Agreement on Deepening Guangdong – Hong Kong – Macao Cooperation in the Development of the GBA aims to strengthen academic exchanges and collaboration among cities in the region. Furthermore, the 2019 Outline Development Plan for the GBA calls for intensified cooperation among universities in

the area. In response, the Macao SAR Government explicitly stated that 'Macao's HE institutions should actively participate in the development of the GBA and integrate into the education cooperation framework and overall development of the region, thereby enhancing the institutions' influence and competitiveness' (Higher Education Bureau 2020, 30).

Robertson's (2011) theoretical framework on re-bordering and re-ordering in education further sheds light on the spatiality, territoriality, and subjectivity relationships in the emergence of the GBA as a subnational higher education region. The connection between the political/nationalist and economic/educational goals demonstrates how the change in territorial units has resulted in the reconfiguration of state – society – citizen relations within varying political and economic contexts. Specifically, higher education in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao has undergone various changes, including de/re-statisation (i.e. the process of privatisation and subsequent return and retention of state control due to political considerations), de-sectoralisation (i.e. the emergence of new players in higher education), and de/re-politicisation (i.e. the application of economic constitutionalism through marketisation and the resurgence of political constitutionalism through (re)subsidising higher education) in response to neoliberal globalisation. However, the post-colonial identity of the two SARs and the development of the GBA as a political and economic framework have accelerated the process of re-nationalisation (i.e. the expansion of state authority by reconstructing and reasserting the national territory).

To sum up, the link between the policies of regional integration and higher education institutions' global competitiveness in the context of the GBA, as illustrated in this study, is indicative of the ongoing transformation of state – society – citizen relations in the SARs' higher education systems. The reconfiguration of territorial units has played a significant role in shaping the socio-political identity and policies of the SARs, and this transformation is likely to continue as the GBA develops further.

Discussion and conclusion

This article demonstrates the adoption of two parallel governmental rationalities, namely neoliberalism and Chinese nationalism, in the higher education policy discourses embedded within the policy addresses of post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao. The discourse analysis reveals a transition toward governmentality with Chinese characteristics, uncovering the gradual and continuous nature of change towards decolonisation and re-Sinicisation in Hong Kong and Macao's higher education. This contrasts with the existing literature on Hong Kong, which emphasises the maintenance of the colonial status quo under the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework (Cheung 2021), and highlights the sudden and significant shifts triggered by the 2019 protests and the introduction of the National Security Law in 2020 (Baehr 2022; Vickers and Morris 2022). Given the emphasis on aligning the political system, political culture, and higher education governance in the Chinese context (Wen and Marginson 2023), the gradual and continuous transition towards Chinese governmentality, coupled with its association with decolonisation/re-Sinicisation, essentially challenges the concept of 'One Country, Two Systems' as the status quo, and underscores the necessity of the changes examined in this article. In other words, the changes are considered a natural extension of China's political centralism and nationalism rather than a result of specific policies or personal attributes of China's central leadership (cf. Lin 2023; Vickers 2024).

From the mid-1990s, neoliberalism exerted a significant influence on higher education developments in both cities through the implementation of managerialism as well as marketisation. Following the return of Hong Kong and Macao to Chinese sovereignty, nationalism emerged as a political rationality of the state, which has given rise to policy discourses focused on promoting patriotism and shaping the behaviours, desires, and aspirations of both organisations and individuals. These nationalist discourses have been further amplified by the recent intensification of national integration through the GBA strategy.

Neoliberal reforms, which stressed competition and competitiveness in the global context and emerged in Hong Kong and Macao's higher education during the transitional periods, became prevalent when a managerial form of governance was introduced after the handovers. The discourses on aligning with international standards and enhancing global competitiveness and the concomitant quality assurance exercises and internationalisation measures vividly exemplify performance monitoring and management by measuring and comparing productivity or outputs (Ball 2003; Deuel 2022). These policy discourses and measures manifest rationalities and technologies that facilitate the construction of a neoliberal discursive environment, within which academic staff are transformed into 'responsibilised self-managing subjects' who are enthusiastic about accomplishing the preferred policy and institutional objectives (Peters 2017). Such rationalities and technologies constitute a neoliberal form of governmentality, as its emphasis on competition encourages academics to adopt the role of entrepreneurial selves or responsibilised selves, utilising rational choice and cost–benefit calculations to define their own interests (Jordana and Levi-Faur 2005).

Such neoliberal logics are integrated with Chinese nationalist discourse to form the political rationalities within the SARs' 'One Country, Two System' context. As examined in this article, while integration and cooperation with the mainland are recognised as means to enhance the SARs' competitiveness, such initiatives and actions also facilitate the integration of the SARs with Chinese national development. This integration seeks not only to enhance the SARs' competitiveness but also to align with Chinese nationalism, fostering SARs' deeper ties with the mainland. This constitutes the discursive environment that promotes thriving with and serving the motherland, which underpins the integration with mainland China. The confluence of neoliberal and nationalist rationalities also shapes the participation of Hong Kong and Macao's higher education in the GBA strategy. Indeed, the policy addresses explicitly state that the GBA is an important framework for future higher education policy initiatives, such as the establishment of branch campuses, cross-border research cooperation and industry-academia research collaboration. Thus, Hong Kong and Macao's universities are encouraged to actively cooperate with academic, government, and corporate sectors in the region. At the same time, nationalist discourses, such as strengthening patriotic and national security education and enhancing young people and students' national pride and patriotism, are highlighted in the SARs' participation in the GBA strategy. The concept of spatial governmentality then substantially reveals how the GBA strategy, as a re-bordering exercise, entails the transformation of the SARs' socio-political identity with the aim of decolonialising or re-Sinicising their higher education (Robertson 2006; 2011).

The developments in higher education in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao align with contemporary China's governmentality, which instils individuals with neoliberal

values of economic development, self-enterprise, material gains, potential social mobility, and nationalist values of patriotism. This results in the production of a self-enterprising subject that is both autonomous from state planning agencies and still linked to the nation through strategic expressions of patriotism and nationalism (Hoffman 2006). In this context, professionalism in academia is presented as a discursive shaping of loyalty to the nation (Han 2021). Therefore, the combination of neoliberalism and Chinese nationalism in post-colonial Hong Kong and Macao's higher education is not simply a manifestation of the interplay or merger between globalisation processes and the evolving national and local settings (cf. Marginson 2018). Instead, it elucidates governmentality in higher education in the post-colonial Chinese societies, where the practical use of neoliberal logic is aligned with nationalist objectives and stems from sovereign will.

The shift towards Chinese governmentality in Hong Kong and Macao's higher education signals profound implications for academic freedom and autonomy. This transition, embedding deeper integration with mainland China's political and cultural norms, raises concerns about the sustainability of free intellectual inquiry. As universities increasingly align with national directives, the autonomy that has characterised these SARs' higher education has been compromised. This evolution has cultivated an academic climate of caution, where self-censorship at both institutional and individual levels has been observed as a necessary adaptation to avoid the repercussions of political discordance (see Baehr 2022; Hao 2016 for details). Within this context of governmentality with Chinese characteristics, academics in Hong Kong and Macao need to navigate their dual roles as 'political socialisation implementers' and 'academic freedom pursuers', striving to balance state directives with academic integrity (Du 2018). In this sense, the evolution poses a critical challenge – preserving academic freedom while navigating the nuances of Chinese governmentality. This balancing act will not only crucially influence the future of higher education in Hong Kong and Macao but will also articulate the broader interplay between state governance, academic freedom, autonomy, and responsibility in these post-colonial Chinese societies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Work on the paper was supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council, University Grants Committee (Project No. 18606017) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China.

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